

NATIVE COMMUNITIES AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

ROUNDTABLE

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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NATIVE COMMUNITIES AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2021

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:13 p.m. in room 628, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Brian Schatz, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BRIAN SCHATZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM HAWAII

The CHAIRMAN. We are going to reconvene for the purpose of a roundtable. I want to thank everybody for participating in person and for logging on.

Today we are going to hear about the range of impacts that Native communities are experiencing due to climate change, as well as the solutions that they bring to the table. I am going to kick things off by asking the panel some questions in a minute, but first I want to go over the housekeeping aspects of how to participate remotely. Each panelist is participating remotely. Members will be able to see you on the WebEx, and they will be able to call on you accordingly. I would ask the panelists and the members to remain on mute until you are recognized.

Panelists should feel free to jump in at any time, even if the question is not directed at them. Just be sure and raise your hand physically, or raise your hand in the chat so that we can recognize you and make sure you are on the monitor for everybody to see.

Please identify yourself as you start to speak, so that our court reporter can accurately pick up who is speaking.

Now, for introductions. We are honored to be joined by Mr. Jack Wong, the Chief Executive Officer of Kamehameha Schools in my home State of Hawaii. Mr. Wong will be joined by Ka'eo Duarte, the Vice President of Community Engagement and Resources at the Kamehameha Schools. Welcome to you both.

On behalf of Senator Murkowski, who has been called back to vote, they told her that her vote was not recorded for the record—I was right next to her and she did vote—we want to welcome Nikoosh Carlo, Founder and Chief Strategist of CNC North Consulting. On behalf of Senator Cantwell, we want to welcome Chairperson Charlene Nelson of Shoalwater Bay Tribe of Washington. On behalf of Senator Tester, I want to welcome Chairman Timothy

Davis of Blackfeet Nation of Montana. And Senator Cortez Masto, are you on the WebEx?

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. I am here, Mr. Chairman. If you would like, I would absolutely be delighted to have the pleasure to introduce Chairwoman Amber Torres, of the Walker River Paiute Tribe in Nevada, along with Ms. Elveda Martinez, who is joining her, who is the Water Resources Coordinator for the tribe. I can't say how excited I am, and thank you for the opportunity to invite Chairwoman Torres to this hearing.

I want to highlight something that most people don't realize. I am so proud of our tribal communities in Nevada. The Walker River Paiute Tribe has really been proactive in combating the effects of climate change. In 2018, the tribe put forward a thoughtful climate adaptation plan to outline the potential impacts of climate change on their community. The tribe was awarded a tribal climate resilience grant of \$69,000 from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

I am so proud of the work they are doing. This is why it is so important to continue to support our tribes across the Country. I am so pleased that they both could join us today. Thank you for allowing me to introduce them.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cortez Masto.

On behalf of Senator Smith, we would like to welcome President Shelley Buck from Prairie Island Indian Community in Minnesota.

I believe Senator Ben Ray Luján is on the WebEx to introduce his guest from New Mexico.

Senator LUJÁN. Thank you, Chair Schatz and Vice Chair Murkowski for holding this important roundtable today. I look forward to hearing how tribes are combating climate change and what Congress can do to support their efforts.

I want to introduce Governor Quanchello of Picuris Pueblo of New Mexico, a fourth-term governor of New Mexico's smallest pueblo, where he was born and raised. We will also be joined by Lieutenant Governor Wayne Yazza, and Les Rubin, who is the chief financial officer for the Pueblo.

At the start of his fifth term he helped spearhead the 1-megawatt solar project in which the community puts out kilowatts in a purchase power agreement with the local electric cooperative.

The Governor served on the tribal council for the past five years and also established a charcoal production project with the pueblo's forestry program that recycles timber from forest projects into an economic development resource.

I very much appreciate Governor Quanchello being available today and look forward to his testimony.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

I want to jump right into it. I have some opening remarks. I will submit them for the record.

The prepared statement of Senator Schatz follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. BRIAN SCHATZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM HAWAII

Good afternoon. Welcome to today's roundtable. Thanks to everyone for participating and logging on.

Today, we're going to hear about the range of impacts Native communities are experiencing due to climate change, as well as the solutions they are bringing to the table.

I'll kick things off by asking the panel some questions in a minute, but first I want to go over some housekeeping matters on how to participate remotely.

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Now, for introductions.

We are honored to be joined by Mr. Jack Wong, the Chief Executive Officer of Kamehameha Schools in my home state of Hawaii. Mr. Wong will be joined by Kaeo Duarte, the Vice President of Community Engagement and Resources at Kamehameha Schools. Welcome to you both.

I will now recognize other Members to introduce their witnesses.

Turning to today's discussion—this roundtable is designed for Native communities to share their perspectives on the climate crisis. We know that Native communities are experiencing disproportionate, adverse impacts resulting from contaminated air, land and water generally. But we want to hear about the actions your communities are taking to respond and adapt to climate change. And learn from your knowledge and experience to help shape the nation's response.

I am particularly interested in the panel's input in three areas: the leadership role Native communities are taking in response to climate change; the costs of inaction; and what Congress and the Biden Administration can do to respond to the unique climate needs of Native communities.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize the Vice Chairman for any opening thoughts she may have.

With that, let me start with a few questions to get the discussion going.

The CHAIRMAN. I want to jump right into the questions. Of course, my first question is for Mr. Wong. I want to thank you for logging on, and I want to thank you for your good work.

This is a question I want to put to the whole panel. The climate problem is described primarily as a problem for people in Washington to solve, and for others to kind of suffer through, right? And for us to address the disproportionate impacts it is going to have in vulnerable communities, including Native communities. Fair enough; I think that is a fair enough way to look at things.

But I am more interested in what we on this panel and what we in this Congress can learn from Native communities in terms of resource management, not just adaptation to climate change, but developing solutions in the direction of climate action.

So Mr. Wong, how is the use of traditional knowledge being used to develop climate mitigation and resilience strategies in Hawaii? After Mr. Wong, I will go down the line of the panelists.

**LIVINGSTON "JACK" WONG, CEO, KAMEHAMEHA SCHOOLS;
ACCOMPANIED BY KA'EO DUARTE**

Mr. WONG. Aloha mai kakou. Thank you, Chair Schatz and Vice Chair Murkowski, and members of this Committee, for allowing us to be here.

As a Native Hawaiian educational organization and landowner, we have a deep kinship to our island, for our lands, our ecosystems, our cultural resources, our water resources. Through our genealogy, we believe we have inherited the responsibility to ensure the health and vitality of our islands. That health and vitality directly impacts the health and vitality of our people, our children, and our students.

In the face of climate change, Native Hawaiian people face grave threats to our island homes. Climate change for us impacts our coastal near-shore waters, impacts our terrestrial lands, our weather patterns, our economic and social systems, and cultural resources. Most importantly, it impacts our way of life and in many ways our very identity.

Through our collective action, though, we have found that our people have successfully demonstrated our ability to come together, plan and implement culturally-driven, using traditional culture and knowledge, to come up with climate solutions.

I would like to introduce Ka'eo Duarte, who runs our community on AINA resiliency part of our organization to really share some examples.

Mr. DUARTE. Aloha to Chair Schatz, Vice Chair Murkowski and to the other esteemed Native leaders and representatives. Much aloha to you from Hawaii.

To what Jack said, climate change is affecting and will continue to affect individual communities and ecosystems in very different ways. So solutions need to be place-based at the local level. This is where climate policy and plans hit the ground, this is where the rubber meets the road. Because indigenous people have long-standing generational and genealogical connections to specific environments, to place, we are most equipped to develop and implement innovative mitigation and resilience activities.

To give you an example of what this looks like on the ground, in a place called Kahalu'u, 15 minutes down the road from where I am sitting, the Native Hawaiians of this place have large declines in our Native fisheries, our primary traditional food source. Such food insecurity contributes to reliance on imported goods, they obviously have a larger carbon footprint. It increases our community vulnerability to climate related, pandemic related and other disasters.

So to address this community with ourselves as the landowner, developers, government agencies and other stakeholders created a plan to let the place rest, let the species recover. During this period, community members engaged in traditions and practices of people of that specific place to both observe and record species recovery and threats such as coral bleaching which is a serious issue for us here in Hawaii.

It worked; it worked even better than imagined. It worked better than other marine managed areas around the State of Hawaii. And the species are recovering faster than expected.

Now the community, with government and researchers and scientists are developing a long-term plan rooted in indigenous values and importantly, incorporating the knowledge of the people of that place.

So kind of in a nutshell, trusting and relying upon the local Native community to co-develop and implement place-based solutions works. We believe it is especially relevant to climate action and we encourage Congress to support this kind of collaboration and investment in Native community intelligence.

The CHAIRMAN. I want to thank you both of you for your testimony, and say aloha to you guys. It has been a while since I have been home. I miss you; I miss Hawaii. Thank you for your insights.

I am going to forego sending it down to the panel, because there are so many members who want to ask questions. But I just wanted to flag for staff and everybody who is thinking about the next steps in climate action to really listen carefully to what is being said here, that climate solutions are not exclusively found in spreadsheets or in tax credits or in incentives or even in the regulatory area. It is in the actual physical restoration of the land and the water and our streams and our lakes. That Native wisdom has to be incorporated into any climate policy that we have.

With that, I will turn it over to Senator Jon Tester.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JON TESTER,
U.S. SENATOR FROM MONTANA**

Senator TESTER. Thanks, Chairman Schatz. I am glad you prefaced what I am going to say with what you just said. I have an incredible appreciation for the Native Americans' grasp of Mother Earth, and their ability to do things that, as you said, may not be on a spreadsheet or a tax credit, but they are the right thing to do for the health of the earth.

In that regard, I want to introduce today Chairman Davis, who is Chairman of the Blackfeet Tribe. Blackfeet Country extends from the Canadian line down, borders the east side of Glacier National Park. Even though I know that Chairman Davis would love to be with us today, he joins us virtually from Browning, Montana. He has been a great leader for the Blackfeet Nation. Under his leadership, he has led the way, the Blackfeet Nation has led the way in responding to climate change.

Over the past few years, the Blackfeet Nation has assessed the impacts of climate change on their reservation and developed an adaptation plan to ensure the continued health of their people and their lands. The plan is a living document, so it speaks to the community and they will continue to update it as their needs and priorities expand and grow.

I work with Chairman Davis on everything from protecting sacred lands to building out water infrastructure in Blackfeet Country, all efforts that are part of the community's climate change response. I am eager to continue this work.

I believe we have a great deal to learn from Native Americans about responding to climate change and how we do it in a common-sense way. So I look forward to hearing from Chairman Davis, and I appreciate any comments the rest of the panelists make today.

Thank you, Chairman Schatz.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Tester.
Senator Luján.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BEN RAY LUJÁN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW MEXICO**

Senator LUJÁN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Governor Quanchello, thank you for joining us today. What you have done at Picuris Pueblo by providing the portable solar energy to members of the public and surrounding community is truly extraordinary. Currently, 50 percent of American households or businesses do not have access to rooftop solar. That is why last Con-

gress I introduced the Community Solar Consumer Choice Act, to encourage greater adoption of community solar.

Governor Quanchello, why did the Pueblo choose community solar as a model for your energy needs?

**STATEMENT OF HON. CRAIG QUANCHELLO, GOVERNOR,
PICURIS PUEBLO; ACCOMPANIED BY LES RUBIN**

Mr. QUANCHELLO. Picuris chose solar, as being in a rural setting and having been the smallest pueblo in New Mexico, being located in northern New Mexico, and being part of the poorest part of Taos County and seeing the climate change. We tend to see more sun and less moisture.

With that said, and being able to harness the sun, it is two-thirds cheaper than electricity. Also, we wanted to provide a means, a mechanism for our tribal members, instead of a handout or instead of funds or stuff like that, this is something that could offset the community's utility costs, and it is something that everybody, it happens, it is a necessity. Being in northern New Mexico and not having access to natural gas and having to do propane and a high rate electricity to heat our homes, we felt that solar would be our best bet.

And number one, how could we offset our utility bills. This is a means, a mechanism to do that. We have successfully done that now for going on about two years.

Senator LUJÁN. Governor Quanchello, as the Biden Administration looks toward greater action on climate, why is it important that pueblos, tribes and indigenous communities have fair and equitable access to programs that combat climate change and promote clean energy?

Mr. QUANCHELLO. Senator, members of the Committee, Chairman, being stewards of the land and Mother Earth, we felt that it is in our best interests and the best interests of those around us because we all see climate change happening. It is happening every day. But we are not acknowledging that. And we wanted to do our small footprint to help better be stewards of the land in any way that we can.

Senator LUJÁN. Governor Quanchello, can you share some of the lessons you have learned from implementing the Picuris community solar project that other pueblos, tribes, and indigenous communities can learn from?

Mr. QUANCHELLO. Senator, and members of the Committee, some of the things that we learned about this project have been, kind of what we are seeing now with Texas and all these areas is that we need to be able to harness our own power. Being in a rural setting it is vital that we have electricity. Because a lot of people forget that in an emergency situation, we can't call the ambulance. With no power, we can't call emergency services here in a rural setting.

So we needed to find a mechanism which would allow us to be able to get the same, if not better, coverage than everybody else and have equal to everybody else when it comes to emergency services.

I will have Les Rubin respond to that as well.

Mr. RUBIN. Thank you, Senator. In the process of us having our first megawatt system, we have had many, many tribes from New

Mexico and the Southwest come through. One of the lessons is that there is a cooperative and collaborative relationship with our local co-op utility.

Many of the tribes expressed, first of all, that cooperative opportunity occurred, Kit Carson co-op removed themselves from Tri-State which has a whole different philosophy in regard to a model that was using fossil fuels, not renewable energy. So when they removed themselves from Tri-State and went on their own with a renewable energy philosophy and models, we immediately then partnered with them.

But one of the feedbacks to the Committee is, there is a great deal of problems with utility companies. With the proper research by the Committee, if you can open that up in regard to the ability for tribes to then go on their own or have a collaborative relationship, that would be very helpful. Because there is friction there between creating community solar and the utility companies.

Senator LUJÁN. Governor, I thank you and your team so much.

Chair, I will yield back as I share with everyone that this project has been so successful that I understand Picuris Pueblo is also working on a second micro-grid solar array. It is going to be important for us to understand how the Department of Energy Office of Indian Energy Support has been instrumental to these projects and how we can improve that.

Governor, thank you so much, and Mr. Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Murkowski.

**STATEMENT OF HON. LISA MURKOWSKI,
U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA**

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to comment on our colleague's observation about the micro-grids and Office of Indian Energy. We certainly see that play out in Alaska. I think there is much more potential that we have within that particular agency.

I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having this roundtable, and thank you to all the participants. I know that in Alaska we have certainly seen how resiliency and innovation have really helped in our rural areas, helped our Native people as they are experiencing the impact of climate change in a very real and often-times very personal way.

Earlier this year, there was a family in Chefornak, which is a village on the Yukon Kuskokwim, and they were forced to evacuate because there was a sinkhole caused by thawing permafrost that opened up underneath the home there. That is pretty direct. That is pretty personal to your family.

We are seeing the impact of coastal erosion on several dozen Alaska Native villages. We are seeing wildlife migration patterns that are changing, and thus the impact to subsistence resources and food security. Our subsistence hunters have seen unusual mortality events for certain seal populations. Bowhead whales are moving further offshore. Again, significant impact to our Native people when it comes to food security.

Dr. Carlo, first of all, thank you for being part of the roundtable discussion. More importantly, just thank you for your leadership in

so many different areas, both in our State and more broadly on the national scale. I want to ask about the communities that I mentioned, I said roughly a couple dozen communities are threatened by coastal erosion. The estimated need for these environmentally threatened communities is about \$4.3 billion to address climate change impacts on infrastructure, at least another \$2 billion needed to protect tribal infrastructure in the lower 48.

As it relates, though, to those villages where we know that the threat to the community is real and requires action, I have been out to Newtok, which is literally sinking and washing away. Fortunately, that community is in the process of moving. I have been over to the new site, Mertarvik. It is testimony to, again, you want to talk about resilience, but also the difficulties in relocation and the expense.

The Newtok village council navigated multiple Federal and State agencies to obtain funding and implement design, engineering, and construction. It has been a challenge. This is just one, this is just one of dozens of villages.

So the question to you is, what can we in Congress do to better facilitate, to be working with the Administration to provide for more clear policy in terms of directive to Federal agencies, in collaborating with tribes as they are facing climate change issues and adaptation, but also to help them identify agency resources, specifically related to infrastructure development and need? If you can speak kind of generally to that. I know it is an issue for us in Alaska, but I also know that it is a broader issue throughout the Country.

**STATEMENT OF NIKOOSH CARLO, Ph.D., FOUNDER/CHIEF
STRATEGIST, CNC NORTH CONSULTING**

Dr. CARLO. Thank you very much, Senator, members of the Committee.

I first want to acknowledge that I am joining from the traditional lands of the Duwamish people, that is where I live and work. I was born and raised in the interior region of Alaska, in Fairbanks and in the village of Tama, which is on the confluence of the Tama and the Yukon River.

I have a couple of points to make, some numbers to really highlight. In 2009, the Federal Government identified 31 villages that were environmentally threatened due to increasing rates of coastal erosion and thawing permafrost. In 2019, in a statewide threat assessment, there were 144 environmentally threatened communities that needed to consider things like whether or not they were going to retreat, relocate, or protect in place. So this is a problem that we are all aware of, but it is going to grow, it is not just going to be Alaska. It is going to be across the United States.

We know that through, after 25 years of persistence and planning, some residents of Newtok moved to their new village location of Mertarvik last year. That took an incredible amount of resources.

So funding is one of those critical, critical questions and things to solve. We can look to existing programs in the Federal Government that are providing some of those funds now and ensuring they have the support they need, like the BIA Tribal Resilience

Program. I think another panelist already mentioned that funding source. And much of that funding provides assistance for technical reports, [indiscernible] and vulnerability assessments, which are really critical to having that proactive long-term vision and approach to communities' response to climate change.

Along those same lines, look at places or agency programs that exist that relate to resilience, building resiliency and climate response, and ensuring that there is a tribal component of those programs to help support local communities. And then really quickly, I will touch on the important of ensuring consistent and stable funding for this proactive climate adaptation. So stable, long-term, how do you build those types of resources, critically important in the short term and also in the long term for community safety and to ensure we are not in a position of responding once something has already happened and the consequences are even more dire.

Lastly, I will quickly mention the need to increase cross-agency, Federal agency coordination but also agency coordination at the State level and the Federal level and with tribal governments to ensure that there are those voices from the local level as part of the decision-making process. You can point to a couple of examples of where that has worked and places where we might to strengthen that. There is our executive steering committee that was formed to look specifically at our [indiscernible] issues and consider how to better equitably include tribes and indigenous peoples in that forum.

There is also the White House Council on Native American Affairs, again, putting more resources and empowering them to provide that cross-agency coordination and communication.

Senator MURKOWSKI. I appreciate what you said there, particularly at the end, in recognizing the involvement of those that are most affected, those that are on the ground, the local knowledge, if you will. Far too often, I think we see government efforts to address, whether it is climate change, or whatever the initiative may be, developed by people who are outside of Alaska, more often than not back here in Washington, D.C., far from the communities that are impacted. So your input on that is important.

You mentioned the cross-agency coordination. I think about the example of Newtok and the new community of Mertarvik. Some who are in a position where they are looking to also relocate are saying, well, that is the example, and they were able to do it, so we are next on the drawing board, without recognizing that it has been a decade-plus in the making. You mentioned the cross-agency coordination involving every agency out there, including the Department of Defense through the IRT.

So it is an example of how it needs to be all knit together but also how challenging that is when you are a small village out in southwest Alaska, without a lot of resources to begin with, much less navigating a Federal bureaucracy, it is extraordinarily difficult.

Final point that I would make on this is your point to ensuring that we are looking to the long term. Again, Newtok-Mertarvik is yet another example, finding pots of money to be able to tap in, do one aspect of the project, but not really knowing where you are

going to get the resources for next year to keep it going. This has been a challenge and a struggle that has added to the cost.

There is no longer-term strategy. I think when you have no longer-term strategy for funding, it just of its own nature becomes that much more complicated, and ultimately more expensive. So these are some policy considerations that we need to be looking to.

Dr. Carlo, I really appreciate what you have shared for the Committee. I will have a couple of other questions but I know that other members would like to weigh in here as well, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Cortez Masto.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEVADA**

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, thank you, Ranking Member, for putting together this incredible roundtable.

Let me reach out and ask Chairman Torres and Ms. Martinez to weigh in here. As a western State, we have such challenges right now with drought and extreme heat. We have wildfires that are happening. I know our tribal communities have been so significantly impacted for so many of the reasons that everybody has talked about today.

Chairwoman Torres, can you talk to us about what are the most challenging climate impacts happening right now that are threatening your community and cultural resources?

**STATEMENT OF HON. AMBER TORRES, CHAIRWOMAN,
WALKER RIVER PAIUTE TRIBE; ACCOMPANIED BY ELVEDA
MARTINEZ**

Ms. TORRES. Thank you so much for the question.

With us, the most challenging climate impacts are drought and high temperatures which affect water resources. During the last 15 years, the tribe has faced extreme drought. Drought impacts farming and ranching on the reservation, since all farms are flood-irrigated with water coming from the Sierra snowpack.

The tribe is at the end of the Walker River watershed. That absolutely has to be noted as well. Crop production has decreased sometimes as much as 40 percent due to lack of water. Cattle grazing during the drought has caused a 50 percent reduction in cattle herds. And many of our tribal members depend on farming and ranching as a sole source of income. So the economic impacts are crucial and great.

I will turn the time over to my technical assistance and my expertise on the subject matter, Elveda Martinez, my water resources coordinator, to talk about the mitigation issues.

Ms. MARTINEZ. Thank you, Senators, and Committee members.

As Amber says, right now, I would like everybody to know, about 90 percent of the west is now either abnormally dry or is in a drought, which is among the highest percentages in the past 20 years according to last week's drought monitor. So again, in the southwest, which we are considered, water is more valuable than gold.

As Amber said, we are an agriculture tribe. One of the things that we would really like to do here to save water is to upgrade our irrigation system, so that our farmers can have better crops.

In the last couple of years, last year, when farmers are only getting 50 percent of what they normally get it really impacts their pocket-book and their livelihood. Again, our farmers and our ranchers are mainly impacted.

Some of the things we were able to do though is, we were able to renovate a part of our irrigation system, only one mile. We have 44 miles of irrigation system. One mile of putting in a new pipe cost \$2.1 million. Since then we have been looking to all these other agencies, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Reclamation, all these entities, to try to find additional funding. It is so hard to get anything done.

The other thing that we have seen is with the different climate happening on the Sierra Mountains, one year we will have massive snowpack and then we will have flooding. So the flooding impacts our river system, and erosion and problems like that. Again, it is so hard to even get any money to even repair our river system. With that, we have searched out to the Army Corps of Engineers and other programs.

It is just not enough for everybody to work together. I think somebody else is what we need to do, is, if all these other programs can all work together to help the tribes, it would really benefit us all.

In 2019 we pulled everybody together, but what happened is there is just not money out there for tribes to do the projects that we need. The other thing that found out is that sometimes you have to have these extensive technical reports in hand in order to get funding like even through FEMA or some other entities. Right now, we don't have the staff or the expertise to do those technical reports.

Again, we really appreciate the funding that we get through the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the climate change programs, but it is very limited, and it is not very much. So again, it is always like we are always trying to, it feels like we are all competing with other tribes in order to get a little piece of the pie. For example, on our reservation, some of the mitigation things that we would like to do also is to enhance renewable energy. We have been working on a geothermal project for eight years. We are kind of dependent on the BIA Energy and Mineral Resource Department. Sometimes we get funding but most of the time we don't. So it is like we are working at a snail's pace.

The other thing that we would like to do is what the Pueblos are doing down there, we would like to retrofit our buildings and our homes with solar panels. Right now, in the last five years what we have found is we have over 30 days of 100-degree weather. So what we are seeing is the increase of the heat and the sunlight. I love it. But the thing is, we need to utilize that to help our homes and our buildings, cut down on costs of utilities.

I think all the tribes are experiencing a lot of the same issues. But us in the southwest, again, it is the heat, the drought and the funding, like I think everybody is going to say is, it is almost like if we could fix one whole system, one whole irrigation system, if we had \$22 million to fix that, we would be good. We would be good for another 40 or 50 years. But when we are piecemealing it, and

not getting it done, we are losing water, we are losing economics for our people.

Again, I appreciate this hearing. Climate change is a big issue for us. Thank you.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. AMBER TORRES, CHAIRWOMAN, WALKER RIVER
PAIUTE TRIBE

Thank you for allowing us to testify at yesterday's Roundtable on "Native Communities and the Climate Crisis". Please forward our thanks to Chairman Schatz and Vice-Chairman Murkowski for their leadership and concern on this issue. As we all heard from the different speakers, Climate Change has impacted Native communities in extreme ways. It was also good to hear how tribes and Native entities are working to mitigate the impacts.

Our Tribe has been working for years to identify issues and they were identified in our Climate Adaptation Plan that was completed in 2018; this is a working document and is designed to be amended with the Climate Changes. The Tribe was awarded a Tribal Climate Resilience grant of \$69,000 from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) last year, to develop and complete a vulnerability assessment for water users on the reservation, including public water systems, farmers, cattlemen, and recreationists. This assessment is an important step in protecting water resources on the reservation. As we stated yesterday, water is more valuable than gold here in the southwest.

I would like to reiterate some of our priority issues:

Agriculture/Drought: irrigation water for our reservation comes from the Sierra Nevada mountains; Climate Change shifts the patterns of water and snow in the mountains. This year the snowpack is below normal for our area. Shortages are likely to worsen for irrigation. We also have an inefficient irrigation system, losing water due to the inefficiencies. It is nearly impossible to find funding to repair or replace even a short section of the system. Even though we seek funding through the BIA, NRCS, BOR and others. We have a \$22 million need to upgrade our 44 miles of canals. The drought is causing great economic losses to farmers and cattlemen; up to 40 percent losses in crops and 50 percent decline in cattle herds.

Health and Public Safety: There is a great potential for heat related illnesses (heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat rashes) due to the increased temperatures; average annual temperatures have been above the long term average every year since the early 1980's; in the summertime we have experienced 30-days above 100 degrees for the past five years. Rising temperatures dry out the landscape leading to higher potential for wildfires. We do not have wildfires here, but we get the smoke from the California fires have caused people to shelter in-doors during the hottest part of the summer and the bad air quality is hard on those with asthma and breathing conditions. There is a need to study the impacts and long-term health effects.

Renewable Energy: We want to continue with our project to develop renewable energy on our reservation. We have been working on the research and analysis of geothermal energy for 8 years. We have been dependent on the BIA Department of Energy and Mineral Development (DEMO) funding for projects. We are in an area that has great geothermal potential as there are geothermal plants near our reservation. This would lead to long term economic benefits. This energy may also be sold and provided to the Fallon Naval Air Station. We also want to retrofit all tribal houses and buildings with green energy; it would be great to have all of them to have a secondary power source, so we are not so dependent on out-side energy and cut down on energy costs. This would include air conditioning systems on homes; not evaporative coolers that bring in smoke, pollens, etc. Tribal members, living in poverty cannot afford the necessary cooling systems. We are at the end of the electrical grid; when that goes down, the systems go down; we need a stable backup system, like solar panels. These projects mean jobs for our people; we have a high unemployment rate of 37 percent.

One of the most important issues that we want to stress is the effects that climate change is having on cultural resources and traditional food sources used by our tribal members.

The Lahontan cutthroat trout has been gone from Walker River and Walker Lake for at least 10 years. Our Paiute people are called the "Agai Dicutta" or "Trout Eaters". That was our traditional primary source of food and now it is gone, due to water evaporation, heat and the overuse of water upstream. Walker Lake's salinity level is too high and too warm to support trout. We have lost this part of our culture. Funding was provided through the Desert Terminal Lakes funding to purchase water for the lake. This water has started to flow to the lake, but it will be years

before enough water can match the levels needed and meet the evaporation losses. It is up to us to make sure that our river system on the reservation is allowing for that water to flow freely. In 2019 we brought numerous agencies (ACOE, NRCS, BIA, State Departments, etc.) together to see what could be done to work on sediment and erosion problems that were caused by flooding. There were no immediate fixes or adequate funding identified.

Pinenuts are also a main traditional food of our people. Pinyan Pine does not grow in abundance on our reservation. Tribal members travel to other parts of Nevada to pick the pinenuts on BLM and Forest Service lands. During the past 20 years, tribal elders have noticed that the trees are growing in lower elevations closer to water sources. The older trees are dying off at a greater rate and wildfire potential is extreme. The Tribe has met with US Forest Service and BLM officials in an effort to save the trees in areas that are most picked by tribal members as they are cutting down and thinning trees for fire management and sage grouse habitat. When the federal agencies first started thinning out the trees, most tribal members were in opposition, but with all the forest fires, the Tribe sees the need to do this. Climate Change is also impacting the tree growth.

We are hoping to start planting buckberry bushes along our section of the Walker River. This will be dependent on the water flows. These berries are used for jellies and pudding. The bushes upstream have been taken out for increased agriculture. Planting of native plants along the river also helps with erosion and the berries are a source of food for birds and animals.

We believe that the Committee got a good grasp of the many issues, including the historical lack of adequate funding, tribes competing for limited funding, tribes not having the broadband capability to apply, not having the matching funds, the need for consultation and the need for federal agencies, states and other organizations to work together.

Thank you, and all members of the Committee, for allowing us to be a part of this important discussion. It all comes down to how are we going to secure adequate water, traditional foods, enhance our economies, develop renewable energy and look out for a healthy environment for the next seven generations. Chairman Brian Schatz ended with a statement that legislation will be forthcoming for this issue. We are looking forward to seeing how that will help our Native communities.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you, Ms. Martinez.

I just have one more question, and then I want to turn it back to my colleagues as well. Chairman Torres, you and I have talked about this, and the challenge that it is clearly on the funding piece. It always seems that the tribes are competing, not just with other tribes, but with the States and local communities for funding at times at the Federal level.

Can you address that and talk a little bit about that? I know you and I have had this concern, that we should really be, if we are going to find the resources that are necessary for our tribes, maybe we should have separate set-asides or separate funds for our tribal communities.

Ms. TORRES. Most definitely, and again, thank you for the crucial question. We all know that there has not historically been enough funding for Indian Country and the projects that we want to pursue on our respective nations. That is why it is going to be so crucial to have that consultation process with tribal nations at the table to hear our issues, hear our feedback, hear our access barriers, and take a look at how we can collaborate and work together for equal access to those funds.

As you heard, I sit in a lot of budget formulation for Indian Health Services and other crucial programs is, it pits us against one another as tribes. Again, it is so unfair, the access is unfair. The biggest thing is, we have to be able to work together for the next seven generations, the two-legged, the four-legged.

So making sure that we are at that table to hear how we can work together for a better future is most definitely needed. Thank you so much for the question.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you. And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.
Senator Smith.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TINA SMITH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM MINNESOTA**

Senator SMITH. Thank you, Chair Schatz, and Vice Chair Murkowski. I really appreciate you organizing this Committee hearing today. It is quite interesting to hear from Native leaders from around the Country. I greatly appreciate it.

President Buck, [greeting in Native tongue], it is so wonderful to have you with us today. I am very eager for my colleagues on the Committee to have a chance to hear a little bit about what Prairie Island is doing.

Colleagues, President Buck is in her third term as president of the Prairie Island Community. Prairie Island is located on the Mississippi River between Minnesota and Wisconsin. So it is interesting to hear from our leaders from Nevada, because in some ways, our challenge in Minnesota is too much water. President Buck can tell us about that as the community experiences the impacts of climate change along the Mississippi.

President Buck, I am going to turn to you in a minute. I am hoping that you can tell the Committee about Prairie Island's net zero project. I think it is quite interesting, it will be interesting for everyone to hear about. I am especially interested in you describing not only what the net zero project is, but how Prairie Island thinks about energy independence and what kinds of partnerships you have put together in order to make this project work.

**STATEMENT OF HON. SHELLEY BUCK, PRESIDENT PRAIRIE
ISLAND INDIAN COMMUNITY**

Ms. BUCK. [Greeting in Native tongue]. Thank you, Senator Smith and Committee members. Our tribe is really excited about our net zero project, which we launched in February. It will provide us with a sustainable, onsite, clean energy system. We will on developing an energy system that results in net zero emissions.

We are excited, we partnered with two Native-owned companies, Indian Energy and Chief Strategy Group. These companies not only understand how to create the right energy solution for the tribe, but they also understand the Native culture and the importance of what this project means to our sovereignty and our future.

We are one of the first tribal nations to take this on. We hope that it can serve as a model for communities across the United States that aim to protect the earth by reducing their energy impact on the environment. The net zero project for us is a huge step in our energy independence. We are looking forward to working with Indian Energy and Chief Strategy Group on renewable energy solutions that make sense for our tribe.

It is clear that climate change is making energy independence and sovereignty even more vital for tribal communities. Recent

events in Texas and Louisiana, where extreme weather conditions impacted grid stability for millions of people underscores this importance. It is critical that we plan ahead to secure energy sovereignty for the future generations.

Senator SMITH. Thank you so much, President Buck. Could you describe a little bit more how these partnerships work, and what your partners are bringing to the table, what Prairie Island is bringing to the table? I am especially interested in how you think about developing expertise, developing financing, all of that.

Ms. BUCK. Definitely. Thank you for the question. We started on a State level. We worked with the State legislature on trying to get a bill passed to provide some of the funding. We received funding from what we call the RDA fund, which is the Renewable Development Account, on the State level. With that money, we are able to go through a really robust RFP program, where we talked to Xcel Energy, the individual who owns Xcel Energy, who share an island with us. We have talked to Dakota Electric, who is our energy provider. We have talked with the State departments of Commerce, all these different partnerships that we have been working on, even before we got to the RFP stage.

We had a really robust RFP process. We were able to receive 20 applicants. We did 11 interviews, and then narrowed it down to the final four interviews. Indian Energy, Chief Strategy Group, they partnered together with some other companies to help us with this project.

Indian Energy brings the technical expertise on the energy side, and Chief Strategy Group helps us with the communications and making sure that we have all stakeholders involved. I am not just talking like Xcel Energy, Dakota Electric, the State, I am also talking about our tribal members, our community members, surrounding community. We really want our project to be a community-run, community-based project that everyone that is involved will have a say in. We have a survey going out now to our tribal members to fill out. We are really excited about what we can do and where to go.

We are in the really early stages, like I said, we just launched in February, so we are in the really early stages of gathering the information and trying to build out a plan. So I don't have any specifics as far as if we are going to do solar, wind, what we are going to do. But we are excited about the project and can't wait to see it move forward.

Senator SMITH. That is great, thank you so much, [phrase in Native tongue]. Chair Schatz, I can't see you on my screen, but I am happy to turn back and see if other of my colleagues have questions about this. Otherwise, I have other questions, too.

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead, Senator Smith. We are going to let you finish, then I have some final questions. I have one final question for all the panelists, then Senator Murkowski, then we will be done. So go ahead, Senator Smith.

Senator SMITH. Okay, great.

So, to everybody else on the panel, I am interested in, as President Buck is talking about this, she is making the connection between energy independence and tribal sovereignty. I am thinking about what is it that we can do at the Federal level to support

these kinds of projects. I would like to open it up to the others on the panel and have you share what you think we should be thinking about as we move forward with this.

President Buck? Then I will come around.

Ms. BUCK. Perfect, thank you, Senator.

We are thankful to the Committee and the Biden Administration for taking climate change and its impacts on tribal communities seriously. As you have been hearing, the climate crisis has impacted Indian Country in so many different ways. So it will be essential for this Administration and this Congress not to just think about the big picture solutions, but also work with the individual tribal communities on tailored solutions that address our unique situations and needs.

My tribe is working on its own to combat climate change on our reservation. But the harsh reality is that the flooding and the nuclear threat that we are faced with just can't simply be solved with short-term solutions. We each have our own unique issues. For Prairie Island, we have too much water, unlike the tribes out west.

Senator SMITH. Thank you. Anybody else want to comment on this? Yes, please, go ahead, Mr. Duarte.

Mr. DUARTE. Aloha.

Senator SMITH. Aloha.

Mr. DUARTE. Building on what some of the others have said, an interesting thing to look at is looking at energy, water, and food, the nexus of energy, water, and food together when we can. So any time where we can make investments of money, people, or resources that get multiple outcomes at once, obviously that is a good place to put your efforts. [Indiscernible] there are Federal programs currently existing or that can be innovative that are able to tie to a safe food system, which is obviously good for health and nutrition, but to have good local food systems, agriculture, ranching, you are going to have to solve water issues, you are going to have to try and reduce the carbon footprint and get jobs and industry to Native communities.

Any time you can connect the dots between that, although sometimes that is looked at separately, energy, water, food and so forth, we are headed in the right direction.

Senator SMITH. You could teach us a lot about how to think more holistically about these issues. Thank you.

Chair Davis, did you want to say something?

**STATEMENT OF HON. TIMOTHY DAVIS, CHAIRMAN,
BLACKFEET NATION**

Mr. DAVIS. Yes, assuring that tribes are at the table in this legislation that is so critical for our survival. If you remember back in 1980, we had Mount Saint Helens erupt. The fallout from the ash, that next year there was just a regrowth. Then now, they are talking about what could happen if Yellowstone, Old Faithful, erupts.

So I am glad you are taking so serious that it is not fake, it is real, we are all experiencing it, we all need to work together. But our tribes all need to be at the table on this important, important legislation.

Thank you for having this very important roundtable, and for all your great work there. We are so thankful and grateful that it has come full circle.

It was nice to hear Senator Murkowski mention the totem that Senator Inouye received. In one of your conference rooms there is a picture of one of our chiefs, Curly Bear, who was out there in 1913, talking about what was happening, there was no longer the buffalo to sustain us. We had to sell our bark to live and eat and all this stuff, about how we are connected with food certainty, the animals and us, human beings and the brain power we have. This net zero, low cost of energy, solar, electric powered cars we have to develop as we move forward.

In 2050, we heard there will be a surplus of water in the Mississippi. But the Colorado, that might be dry in just 30 years. We don't want that to happen. Look at the animals, the insects, the bees that are not pollinating the crops to sustain us.

We are glad you guys stopped that border wall. Our red brothers from there, we have to be one together, to work together, collaborate and negotiate to make sure that the tribes are at the table at this critical time in our history. We have a long history, so we would just like to make it better, as everyone is talking about.

So again, thank you for this great opportunity to have this hearing of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, and all the work you do for the tribes. The Department of Energy was mentioned, the energy group there. That is a great place there. We need additional funding and be able to not have to compete with the State of Montana for the limited resources that are available, but to work together for sustainability.

We really welcome this opportunity to bring this forward. Thank you, guys, for having this hearing today.

Senator SMITH. Thank you so much.

Chair Schatz, I saw Chair Torres lifting her hand. I think you had something to say, then I will turn it back.

Ms. TORRES. Yes, again, thank you, Senator, for the opportunity.

I think some of the crucial things that are needed are technical assistance, as you heard my expert say, for those smaller tribes at the table that are really striving to make a difference in their communities. I also think that policy change in conjunction with consultation is absolutely crucial. Sometimes decisions are made on a tribe's behalf as to what is going to fit them. But tribes know best about their own areas, and again, their own barriers. So I would like to see some policy change in some of these different areas in which we are going to have some projects.

The last one, again, you have heard it around the table continuously, is funding opportunities, that there be proper funding for these projects that are on the table, and that everybody have the same access to those funds. So thank you so much.

Senator SMITH. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Smith, and thank you to all of our testifiers.

We are to do a bill here. We are going to work on, and whether it is part of a bigger package or not, we are going to try to do a bill on climate.

I want to give all of our testifiers one last chance to very briefly, as specifically as possible, just tell us what you think we should be working on, whether it is money or technical assistance or regulatory change or partnership or whatever it may be. I will start with KHH Schools, either Mr. Wong or Mr. Duarte.

Mr. WONG. Thank you, Senator. I will start.

We know climate change is global. But what we hear from this panel and we know from our communities is that impacts are local. Solutions have to be local. They have to be driven by our communities. How can we have local solutions if we don't seek the knowledge in the context that our Native peoples bring to the conversation?

I am hoping that in legislation there is room for the Native voices. I will make a plug, also, for our Native keiki, our Native kids, because it is really their generation that is being impacted by this. Our hope is that the solutions will also include them and their voice and their ability to talk to legislation as well as the policy.

I will let Ka'eo add a few words, too. Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

Mr. DUARTE. Just real quickly, to add to Jack, again, how do we turn the challenges into opportunities. Climate change, as you heard today, it manifests itself very differently across the Native communities. Infrastructure, whether it is having to do with water, roads, with coastal issues, and so forth, it will be a challenge. It will be extremely costly.

How do we look at the opportunity in that? How do we involve Native people as part of the solutions for infrastructure, and again, for food and energy, water, and training and educational opportunities, job opportunities, stimulate local economies, while we are trying to innovate and improve our infrastructure? Let's not lose another opportunity. A lot of this infrastructure was not designed in a way that really takes into account the places where we all live. Let's do it right this time and let's find those [indiscernible] solutions.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

I am going to go down the line for the ease of people on the panel knowing when they are up. I will start with Nikoosh Carlo, followed by Chairperson Nelson. Then to Chairman Davis, Chairman Torres, President Buck and Governor Quanchello. So, starting with Nikoosh Carlo.

Ms. CARLO. Thank you very much for the opportunity to join you today.

Circling back to what I think is one of the key questions, not only for Indian Country and our tribal communities, but also across the U.S., is how are we going to pay for this, how are we going to fund a strong response to the impacts from climate change? We really need innovative climate financing to build those proactive, preemptive and long-term responses in local communities.

Put really quickly, an idea that I have been working on is creating what I call climate response funds that can draw from diverse funding sources and use collaborative governance to structure and to finance innovative equitable and community-led climate mitigation and adaptation projects. The key there is being able to

draw from different funding sources, like public funding but also private equity and non-profit, and even other revenue streams like carbon markets and bringing all those pieces together. Having a fund that is operated locally by the communities to put those funds where they know it needs to go and where it can make the most impact.

So really it comes down to stable and reliable funding to support climate resilience in the long term. It will be a really big piece of the climate puzzle. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Chairperson Nelson?"

**STATEMENT OF HON. CHARLENE NELSON, CHAIRPERSON,
SHOALWATER BAY TRIBE**

Ms. NELSON. Thank you. I really appreciate hearing all the words. I appreciate people saying we work together, because definitely I believe in that.

I am speaking today to say that we as the Shoalwater Bay Tribe live by the ocean. We are stewards, stewards of the sea. We try to take care of the things that the ocean supplies us with, and the ocean itself. There are changes, the waters rising, things are happening that are not good for fish or anything out there.

We as a tribe have worked together with the State, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Government, and people around us, because that is what I believe in and we all believe in, is standing together to try to protect our oceanfront, our beaches, the ocean itself.

We now look out of our own window, and the berm, which was a natural berm and has been repaired two times by the Army Corps, is devastated, torn down. Our tribe and our small reservation is threatened. Where we are is right on the edge of the sea, 15 feet, probably, is where I am right now above the ocean. We need to move uphill for protection. This is not something that, we are all sea stewards and we will always be, this is our land, the land of our ancestors, but we will have to move uphill for protection of our people.

As I have heard many other people say, it will be expensive for what we want to do, and we will need help. And we help, we are building a tsunami tower that will protect not only some of our tribal members, but people in lower Tokeland, where they don't have a chance if the tsunami comes.

As I look out at the berm, we have had many big, big storms. We are trying to protect estuaries and places that need to be where they are, to keep fish, salmon, alive. Things have changed. As we stand, we are asking for help to be able to finance, we have purchased some land. But getting up to it is going to be hard. It will be very, very expensive, the infrastructure will be expensive.

But what we build will be good for the climate. We have to stop what we are using, we are using all the things up for us in this generation. We need to clean up and do better. I am 81, 2 months and 10 days. I have seen, I have always lived by the sea or on the sea. I know what we are facing is very, very hard.

Do you have any questions?

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you so much, Chairperson Nelson. We will take additional questions for the record. We appreciate your compelling testimony and look forward to a partnership with you.

Moving on to Chairman Davis, from the Blackfeet Nation of Montana.

Members of the panel, we are running out of time. If the final panelists could try to confine their response to a minute or so, that would be helpful, in terms of allowing Senator Murkowski to have some final questions before we actually run out of time.

Chairman Davis?

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Water and climate change go hand in hand. The recent water settlement in 2016, we need that funded so we can assure our agriculture producers receive that much-needed water. Senator Tester is aware of the fact that, as a farmer, without water, our crops can't grow. If we don't have crops, we don't get to eat.

Therefore, we desperately need the funding within these water settlement projects so we can begin to do our infrastructure development that is so critical for our survival.

I would like to again thank the Committee for hearing us. We want to stress the need to fund our water settlement act so we can begin to work on these much-needed projects. We need to do these agricultural improvements and we need to get these water projects off the ground so we can begin to get our people back to work so they can continue to eat.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Chairwoman Torres?

Ms. TORRES. Pe-sha uh for allowing us to join you today to speak about such an important topic that has been long overdue. Climate change have had tremendous impacts on our people's daily life, which we have said. We are excited to work with you to make positive changes happen for the betterment of the next seven generations, and the two-legged and the four-legged.

With that, it would take proper funding, policy changes, technical assistance, consultation and collaboration. Again, pe-sha uh for the opportunity.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

President Buck?

Ms. BUCK. [Phrase in Native tongue.] Prairie Island needs tribal land taken into trust to get away from the threats we face that are exacerbated by climate change. We have the flooding from the Federal dam that was built in the 1930s. That flooding from the dam was bad enough when it began. Climate change is making it all worse.

The flooding contributes to another risk. In addition to illegally flooding our lands, the Federal Government licensed nuclear power with storage of over 1,000 tons of nuclear waste is literally right next door to us on our reservation, on our island. The power plant relies on Mississippi River water for cooling purposes.

Because of these threats, we desperately need a solution that will provide new reservation land for us at a safe distance away from the flooding and nuclear threats. [Phrase in Native tongue], I appreciate the time to be with the Committee today.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. And finally, Governor Quanchello.

Mr. QUANCHELLO. Thank you, Chair, members of the Committee. I wanted to say thank you for allowing Picuris to be here.

I am echoing what everybody said, and our biggest thing is how Congress can help us, being the smallest community, or small, rural communities, is by recognizing the fact that sometimes we don't have population, and also educating. A lot of times there are matches that being a small reservation, we can't come up with some of these matches. So it is difficult for us to get the grant.

Also, when we do get the money and there is a match being that it is for renewable energy, a lot of these banks and a lot of these lenders are not aware we are dealing with Federal lands. So it becomes another problem where we have to educate the bankers and educate all these people, so that they can do business with us on tribal lands. In turn, that costs money. That is money that we don't have that we could spend toward the project. But everybody is trying to learn off our plan. I think that is one of the ways.

Also, Congress can support the smaller communities. Sometimes it takes more to do less just because we are in a rural setting. If we can take that into consideration. Additionally, any kind of rule or policy needs to be supported, support that government-to-government consultation and relationship.

Again, I thank the Committee and Chair for allowing Picuris to be here. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Murkowski.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me just provide a few concluding remarks. I think we have gotten some good, constructive feedback from those who have participated. I want to thank each of you.

I think we recognize that so often, with our tribes, there is clearly that local knowledge, that indigenous knowledge, that needs to be taken into account. But there are capacity limitations. I know that for so many of our smaller tribes in Alaska, you have obstacles that confront you from the get-go. You lack reliable broadband, so you can't even begin the grant process because you can't even begin the download.

I think we recognize that those tribes that have full-time individuals that can help them with grants, that is great. But not all are equally situated that way. So how technical support can be made available, I think that is a key part of how we can help with the navigation. Just making sure, again, that there is almost a clearinghouse for these funding opportunities, recognizing that you really have to be searching the Federal funding sources and really know how to navigate that. For many of our tribes, this is just not a practical reality. So how we are able to incorporate that.

Dr. Carlo, I really appreciate what you said about the financing challenges and some kind of a climate response fund. I think that, too, is a significant impediment, and if there were a resource like that.

Our last speaker just spoke to the matching grant issue. I know for us, whether it is a small water project, or whatever the project is, it has been challenge for them to come up with matching grants. So the projects never advance.

I also recognize that particularly when we are talking about consultation, this has got to be, I always say it has to be more than just kind of a check the box exercise. I think it is important to recognize that historically we have seen certain environmental movements that have not particularly been a good ally to Native communities and people. I guess by way of example, we created the National Park System. This is something that we all respect and love, our national parks. But I think we also need to recognize that that moved Native people from traditional hunting areas.

In Alaska, we have so many examples where a refuge, national refuge, is determined from back in Washington, D.C., and the local residents are now, their access to another area, an area that actually happens to have a pretty reliable runway for them to fly safely in and out has now been cut off. So making sure that there is true and meaningful consultation as we move forward.

I know that one of the proposals in the Biden Administration is this 30 by 30 initiative that will help put more of our lands and waters into conservation status. I think the goal is clearly an admirable one. But again, working with our indigenous peoples, working with those who are on the ground, those who use the water, making sure that there is a level of consultation.

I have heard so many times throughout this roundtable: cooperation, collaboration. But we need to be making sure that it is indeed that, and it is truly meaningful.

I don't mean to just go on with my own soliloquy, Mr. Chairman. I am going to ask one more question, and this is about the BIA Tribal Climate Resiliency program. Several of the panelists have mentioned this. I guess the question, and hopefully to just no more than a couple of you, how do we move away from this competitive grant funding to more regular, reliable program funding? This is something that, Dr. Carlo, you have mentioned before. If it is just one small competitive grant after another, it is tough to bring about meaningful, lasting change, because you can't move forward with a real strategy.

Does anybody have any thoughts or ideas as to what we might be able to do to make the BIA Tribal Climate Resiliency Program a more effective and more meaningful program? I think Chairperson Nelson had raised this at one point.

If we can take that, Mr. Chairman, because I know we are trying to wrap here, if members of the panel want to think about what we might be able to do. I think this has been a good opportunity for some building blocks here in terms of what the Committee needs to be looking at. So I appreciate that.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Murkowski. I agree. When we say beneficiary consultation, we really mean it. As our retired friend, the senior Senator at the time from Maryland always said, "nothing about me without me." I think that should be the way we operate generally speaking for this Committee. But also specifically as we think about climate solutions and climate adaptation, that we work together, that we exchange information, that we understand not just the needs but the knowledge in Native communities and how we can develop a little bit more of a symbiotic relationship.

This has been a very constructive beginning to what I hope will be a partnership going forward on these very challenging issues that are not going to go away. So we thank all the panelists and all the members and all the staff that have put together a very, very constructive roundtable.

Thanks very much.

[Whereupon, at 4:27 p.m., the roundtable was concluded.]

